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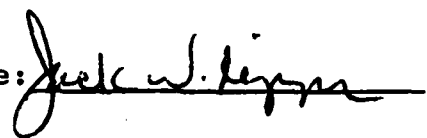
THE IMPACT OF MANEUVER WARFARE STRATEGY/TACTICS ON THE
U.S. MARINE CORPS' INTEGRATED AIR/GROUND (MAGTF) DOCTRINE

by

Jack W. Rippy
LTCOL, U.S. Marine Corps

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Naval Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my our personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature: 

22 June 1984

Paper directed by
~~Captain Jerome F. Watson~~ Colonel T.L. Garkhel
Chairman, Department of Naval Operations

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Abstract of

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THE IMPACT OF MANEUVER WARFARE STRATEGY/TACTICS ON THE
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"But sir," said the little boy, "the Emperor has on no clothes at all!"

The Brothers Grimm

A revolution is being advocated and implemented in the war-fighting approach of U.S. ground forces. It is called maneuver warfare, and it has been officially written into the United States Army's basic battle publication, FM 100-5.¹ It has vocal and articulate proponents in the Marine Corps from company grade to the highest operational command level. Further, it has influential advocates in Washington in both the executive and legislative branches. Its spokesmen hold it forth as a major departure in warfighting thought of historic proportions. It is touted as the optimum way for the U.S. to wage battle as it is effective against numerically superior forces, a situation likely for the U.S. in a major conflict. If institutionalized as urged, it will have tremendous impact on our tactics, internal organization, methods of arms integration, and ultimately, on our force structure. This paper will briefly review maneuver warfare as it is advocated for institutionalization in the U.S. Marine Corps and consider the impact it would have on the aviation element of our integrated air ground team.

CHAPTER II

MANEUVER WARFARE (MW) - AN OVERVIEW

The advocates of M/W have a vocabulary much like any specialized discipline. They use words of art to connote whole concepts and are as jealous of precision in use of their terms as law professors. It will be useful here to review some of these terms and their meaning.

First M/W is not some new idea for mobility or movement in battle as the name might imply. It purports to be a way of thinking about warfighting. A philosophical mind-set that is virtually theological in nature, as the "true believers" tend to evangelical fervor in their advocacy. The analogy here even extends to a certain tinge of the self righteous as the MW advocate connotes the attitude that those who don't quickly "see the light" are fuzzy thinking dinosaurs who are unable to comprehend the lessons of military history. Marine Corps proponents are fond of citing General Breckenridge's inter war call for new thinking among Marine Officers.¹ They include as a key ingredient of M/W a fully developed intellectual background.² Presumably, one reason for resistance to its acceptance is a lack of this properly prepared intellect. The resisters, by the way, are seen as inertia bound sluggards still muddling along with current thinking, labeled Firepower/Attrition Warfare (F/AW).

A treatment of MW is not presently available in a single comprehensive volume. Rather it must be discerned in articles

appearing in various professional military journals and, in some measure, from the lecture circuit peculiar to military thinking. The bibliography to this paper constitutes a compendium of some of these articles and is fairly comprehensive as a collation of definitive material. Mr. Lind credits retired USAF Colonel John Boyd as being the first person to articulate the theory of MW.³ It is contained, says Lind, in the observation - orientation - decision-action (OODA) Cycle theory set forth or "discovered" by Boyd. Boyd's lecture presentation takes a minimum of four hours and dozens of viewgraphs to cover and develop the OODA cycle theory.⁴ Since both opponents in a conflict must iterate through the OODA cycle as they struggle, says Boyd, the one who can do so more quickly will eventually prevail. Just as significantly, the slower opponent will at some point begin to recognize his peril and mentally/morally disintegrate. At the individual level this would be expressed as anxiety and panic; at the Corps level, as a lapse into organizational chaos. The induction of this state in the enemy is the objective of MW. Boyd speaks of "getting inside the opponents mind" hence the MW advocate's emphasis on the psychological over the physical destruction of the enemy.⁵

This psychological breakdown is brought about by the creation of as many unanticipated and threatening, or apparently threatening, circumstances as possible in the enemy's perception. Echoing the Boyd theory, MW is said to mean moving and acting consistently more rapidly than the opponent. In this sense maneuver is defined as relational movement.⁶ "MW is best understood," Lind asserts,⁷

"as a continuous process of change in both reality and appearance whereby the enemy's actions and counteractions are rendered irrelevant in time and place." Or again, "the object of MW is to shatter the enemy's organizational and mental cohesion by creating unexpected and dangerous situations more rapidly than he can deal with them."

A further refinement has been offered by Mr. Lind in his definition of maneuver tactics; "A process of combining two elements, technique and education, through three mental filters or reference points - mission type orders, the search for enemy surfaces and gaps, and the focus of our own main effort - with the object of producing a unique approach for the specific enemy, time, and place." The uniqueness of the approach emphasizes the need for avoidance of repetitive use of tactical techniques or for a formula or recipe for a given tactical situation. In fact, no matter how completely a tactical situation may conform to a previous one, or how successful your approach might have been, one must avoid repetition of procedure.¹⁰ This old style method of training in, and application of, procedures or techniques when presented with a tactical situation, is condemned as "formulistic" and is anathema to the MW proponent. Thus while the "element" of technique is necessary, it must be tempered by the other "element" of education. These folks, therefore, emphasize the need for the broadest possible exposure to quality military concepts, and obviously consider that this is not presently being pursued with adequate vigor.

The definition of maneuver tactics also included three "reference points" that recur frequently in MW articles

Mission type orders - also called Auftragstaktik, involve the expression of the senior level commander's intent over and above rigid, and possibly arbitrary, battle area control measures. This style of command is further said to require much mutual trust between the commanders at all echelons, a concept that the MW advocate seems to feel is unique to MW. Further, it requires each commander to be able to entertain the intent and mission of his seniors two echelons above his own. Given this comprehension, he is unfettered by classic control measures and free to take whatever action he finds will implement the expressed intent;

Focus of our own main effort - also has a German handle, schwerpunkt - and is meant to direct the battle efforts to the enemy's center of gravity - a conceptual objective that seeks to orient on the enemy's weaknesses - physical and psychological, and thus to shatter his cohesion;

Surfaces and gaps - can be thought of as the enemy's strong points and weak points, again not merely in terms of his physical order of battle or firepower array. A weakness constitutes a decisive objective and is attacked by the MW force while it avoids the set-piece battle and enemy strong points, with the need to halt while reducing the latter by costly assaults or the time consuming use of supporting arms.

Another definition that is precious to the MW advocate is the concept of combined arms.¹¹ This is distinguishable in his

vocabulary from the supporting arms concept. The latter, by their definition, is subject to being countered by the enemy by measures taken simultaneously in countering the principal supported arm. That is, for example, taking cover from infantry assault might also protect one from artillery supporting fire. This is as distinguished from combined arms which by definition are brought to bear in such a way that the measures taken to counter one arm, necessarily exposes you to the other or others being employed. Thus a synergistic effect not available in the older concept of supporting arms, naturally associated with FAW.

Throughout, as MW is practiced at each vertical echelon or lateral area, it is emphasized that boldness, initiative and the willingness to take sound risks for worthwhile purposes are necessary. It is implied that, absent the MW mind-set such behavior can occur only by accident and infrequently, whereas where MW is practiced, it is the rule.

At higher echelons the commander is expected to practice the "Operational Art" in prosecuting M/W. This key idea, also a recurring theme in MW literature, is said to be "the use of tactical engagements to strike directly at the enemy's strategic center of gravity." The ability to discern this key point is called "fingerspritzengefuehl" or feeling in the tips of the fingers, and is roughly the same thing as the Napoleonic/Clausewitzian "Coup D'oeil."

A final point of emphasis and recurring theme in MW literature, is the requirement for commanders to permit decentralized

execution of their intent. This connotes a concomitant decentralization of moment to moment decision making that is said to be in apposition or tension to the micromanagement capability available to today's commander through high technology command, control and communications (C³) systems.

The MW spokesmen acknowledge their debt to such historical military theoreticians as Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Fuller, Liddell-Hart and Guderian. Further they cite the World War II German Wehrmacht as the only historical example of institutionalized MW. Two extant practitioners often cited are GeneralOberst Balck, and his chief of staff, Von Mellinthin, hence the prominence of German words of art.

CHAPTER III

MANEUVER WARFARE: A CRITIQUE

In that MW is said to be a way of thinking or mind-set toward war fighting, its proponents are able to find historical applications that are virtually unchallengable. That is, when an historical success is credited to MW or a failure to FAW it is difficult to analyze the critical application. This is because the characterization of the battle is, like Keat's beauty, largely in the eye of the beholder. It is notable in this regard that MW, when applied to historical examples, never seems to have failed. While this phenomenon no doubt results from the historiography practiced by the MW advocates, it is nonetheless disconcerting. Once one digests or synthesizes the concepts presented in the previous chapter, and that overview was admittedly not exhaustive, MW does take on an attractive aura. Who indeed would resist the charms of: boldness and initiative; the synergism of combined arms; trust and loyalty among intellectually enlightened echelons of command; the psychological shattering of the cohesion of the enemy; the unshackling of commanders from restrictive control measures and micromanagement; the implementation of the commander's intent by swift movement; and perhaps, most exhilarating of all - operating inside the enemy's OODA cycle! But before we shuck the Emperor's old robes for the new ones of MW, let us subject it to a more critical look.

First, as a general matter, boldness and initiative are not subject to the monopoly of the MW practitioners. Nor are trust in

juniors, or a willingness to permit the exercise of judgement and discretion by and among them. Obviously, the shattering of the enemy's cohesion is a desirable objective, but it tends to be euphemistic in tone. Warfighting, when accurately described, defined, and characterized, is inherently inimical to euphemistic treatment. Combat destroys a lot more than the enemy's cohesion, even in the historical examples repeatedly cited by the MW writers. It did on the Eastern front, on the Western front, and at Inchon. In fact, General Trainor reminds us that we must let the enemy "know that we intend to kill him, not psych him."¹

Another generalized criticism of MW, and it invites generalizations in that it is stated in intellectual, even abstract concepts, is that it advocates the jettisoning of current doctrine and structural integration, without providing for specific or detailed alternatives. This in turn results in a failure to deal thoroughly with the impact of their approach on current force structure. At present, the precipitate shift to MW by the Marine Corps might be more disruptive to our own cohesion than to the enemy's

A final criticism seems appropriate before addressing the specific concern of this paper. A philosophical system, a system of ethics, or even systematic theology, in order to be relevant must be teachable. Inasmuch as MW is a way of thinking, a philosophical mind-set, is it teachable? Generals Balck and von Mellenthin estimated that only three or four out of one hundred Wehrmacht generals possessed fingersprintzengefuehl² If we must rely on the spontaneous occurrence of this commodity rather than

communicable and teachable ones, are we well advised to institution-
alize MW?

CHAPTER IV

MANEUVER WARFARE: IMPACT ON MAGTF DOCTRINE

The Marine Corps today embodies the only truly integrated air-ground team in the world. The Marine Air Wing exists to provide the full spectrum of aviation assets to the Marine Division. That the Marine Corps presents itself as a seamless package is a bone of contention for one of our sister services, and a point of envy to another. The integration of air thoroughly in combination with other combat arms is burdensome in the internal application, requiring faithful and careful adherence to battle tested procedures. In the face of pressures from without the Corps, we must be especially circumspect about an internally accepted concept that would overthrow the long fought for integration. To do so would endanger one of the hallmarks of our service that presently helps to define its uniqueness. General Trainor reflected the thinking of our leadership well in this statement;

[T]he Marine Corps is unique among the armies of the world because of our total integration of combat power in the air-ground task force and an unparalleled capability to orchestrate the integrated effort. If there were ever a force multiplier on the modern battlefield, it is the Marine Corps' organization for battle.

How then does the Marine Corps accomplish this unique integration; what are the mechanics and underpinnings of this ability or "technique," to use MW parlance. It has been built up through painstaking perseverance over decades. It too involves a mind-set. The Marine Aviator who attends all available professional schooling will have studied tactics from the fire team through the Corps

level, and strategy and policy considerations through the CINC level. He begins his training with his ground counterparts, shares their uniform, and is committed to their mission as his own. Close Air Support begins in the hearts of the practitioners. The application of air delivered munitions in close proximity to friendly units in combination with their scheme of fire and maneuver and their commanders intent, requires control measures that are both strict and clear. Laxness, vagueness or ambiguity in direction and execution will result in ineffective delivery at best, or friendly casualties at worst. But this sort of terminal control of aviation by the ground commander is but the focal point of a doctrinal funnel and hierarchical superstructure. The big end of this funnel opens out through a control system that includes the squadron, group and wing, all typically physically dislocated some distance from the battle area. This superstructure does not provide unnecessary or redundant services. Rather, Marine Aviation is made up of just enough of the precise capabilities to construct and sustain the support required by the ground element commander. This is due, not so much to visionary planning, as to the distillation of long experience.

But there is an additional key factor. This difficult integration, so well refined by battlefield application, has grown up in support of battle doctrine that employs a systematic organization of the battle area. Classically this organization has included a FEBA or FLOT, lateral boundaries, phase lines, FSCLs, objective areas, etc. All those fetters and shackles that MW abhors.

It must be kept in mind that these geographical control measures are not meant merely to permit senior echelon commanders to impose arbitrary limits on the initiative and independence of his subordinates, but rather to permit the sure and timely application of combined arms firepower and logistical support. The FSCC, SACC, TACC, TAOC and DASC require some measure of organization and control to funnel in and combine their controlled arms effectiveness with maneuver elements. MW at present offers no substitute for this doctrinal superstructure.

Rather, some of the most articulate spokesmen seem willing to do without the Close Air Support available today. Here them:

If the aircraft wing must be supported by the ground forces instead of providing them with support, is it time to raise some questions about the viability of close air support?

This was in the context of prescribed mechanized and countermechanized operations that directed application of the ability of fast moving ground units, to the improvement of the survivability of CAS assets, by participating in air defense suppression. It is exemplary of this advocate's thinking that he would question the viability of the air-ground team over this suggestion for synergistic application of firepower. Interestingly this very type of "role reversal" proved effective for the Israelis, less than two years later, in the Bekaa Valley operations.

Traditional concepts of close air support face serious challenges from modern, mobile air defense systems. ...Indeed, close air support, as currently practiced, may be obsolescent...the answer for vulnerable CAS aircraft may be conceptual...decentralized assignment...through a system of forward operating bases and locations from which V/STOL aircraft and helicopter gunships are staged

into the battle area. In place of centralized mission assignment through a DASC, these aircraft are placed under the tactical control of ground commanders. Refueling and rearmament are accomplished at the forward operating bases,...the DASC will no longer process tactical air requests, thereby reinstating close air support as a tactical component of the operational scheme, rather than a separate supporting arm. ...The means by which... air and ground units [can be freed] from detailed, and often restrictive, coordination procedures is through battlefield air interdiction. [which is] conventional fixed wing aircraft [attacking] beyond the fire support coordination line...Using suitable ingress tactics, attack aircraft can then neutralize the enemy target without detailed coordination with ground elements.

At least this writer is attempting to articulate, with some specificity, how he sees that air support can be integrated in MW. Let us consider his plan closely. The surface-to-air threat is not new, nor is it necessarily more intense inside the FSCL than outside. Certainly it does complicate the practice of CAS, but does it eliminate it? I think not. We can employ technical and tactical countermeasures; we can be especially careful while the surface to air threat abates (and sooner or later it will, if targeted properly); and, given sufficient return on the investment, we can take higher losses among our air assets. That is an answer that is not very "conceptual or technical," but nevertheless very real. As to the decentralization of V/STOL assets: a) the ground commander to whom they are attached may not have as great a need for them as his adjacent commander, but without the DASC, priorities over scarce resources can not be determined, much less honored; b) tactical aircraft require much more than refueling and rearming, although even these factors can be beyond the capability of a FOB - even the least complicated aircraft require somewhere between 20

and 60 direct-maintenance-man-hours-per-flight hour on a statistical basis - aircraft break and the ground commander can't fix them; c) BAI is a NATO/British term that the U.S. Air Force has also appropriated - it is nothing but plain old Direct Air Support (DAS) which the Marine Corps has had in its doctrine for many years; d) to relegate "conventional fixed wing aircraft" to targets outside the FSCL would be to risk our force structure in the worst way - even USAF, and certainly USN, aviation assets can perform this mission; e) the integration of air into the battle area involves a top down spectrum of capabilities that begins with the establishment of some measure of air control from opposing aircraft and of friendly ones; f) BAI is the use of air as merely a supporting arm, rather than the combined arms synergism of CAS.

It is notable that both of these spokesmen, who are so cavalier about the viability of CAS as currently practiced, are without experience in battle. Most of the combat commanders to whom I have been exposed would be more reluctant to chuck the CAS baby out with the FAW bathwater, on speculation that MW will thrive in the absence of the control measures required by CAS.

The MW literature revels in the WWII Wehrmacht model.⁴ What did the Germans do about air support? How important did Balck and von Mellenthin find it to be?

Q: "How do you view the role of the Air Force - the Luffwaffe - in highly mobile operations?"

A. (von Mellenthin): "In my opinion it is a decisive question. The Air Force must assist us to destroy the enemy...[in the simulation] we cannot make the counterattack without assistance from the Air Force. There

must be a very close liaison between the Air Force and division, or brigade, [battalion, etc.]."

Q: "[In the circumstances of today], would it be more valuable for the Air Force to support you in close combat, that is, close air support operations, [or by] interdiction in the rear of the enemy against reserves and support units?"

A: "...we are hopeful that this Air Force will have the strength to assist our tactical attack, in addition to the other [interdiction] mission. In the East we were never really dangerously attacked by the [Russian Air Force], but at the Normandy campaign...movement stopped completely [in the day time] because of your Air Force. No movement, impossible."

A. (Balck): "You have to keep one thing in mind, which is repair and maintenance of modern weapons systems, and that can only be done in 'pure units.' The maintenance of the material is of paramount importance and it is not possible to maintain the material in one unit where you have a conglomeration of different types of materiel."

From the perspective of the air to the ground, the German World War II model is evocative of our present system. Consider these glimpses; all from Rudel's first person account:

"We are giving offensive and defensive support in the Luga sector of the front. Occasionally we are also sent out on operational missions far into the interior."

"We are told to mark all the positions precisely on our maps so as to ensure our being able to recognize our own front line."

"The Soviets are attacking the airfield with tanks and infantry, and we are less than a mile away. A thin screen of our own infantry protects our perimeter;"

"We are in close liaison with the ground forces and do our best to answer their every call for attack and support. ...It is on such occasions as these that the Army commends our usefulness and the effectiveness of our attack."

"Bitter fighting rages for a block of houses, for a single cellar, for a bit of factory wall. We have to drop our bombs with painstaking accuracy because our own soldiers are only a few yards away..."

"On the ground we meet old acquaintances from the East Front, crack divisions for whom we are happy to fly."⁶

Thus it appears clearly, that the prime practitioners of institutionalized MW, would endorse an integrated air ground combination of arms such as presently available only in the U.S. Marine Corps.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Military history is replete with examples of lives, battles and wars lost due to an inability or unwillingness to adapt to new technology, adopt new doctrine and even to think in new ways. This no doubt gave rise to General Breckenridge's admonition to entertain new ideas, especially in interbellum periods. Proponents of MW indicate that without its institution and institutionalization we can expect to lose the next conflict, or at best to end it with excess or exorbitant losses. They go further, urging a "fundamental rethinking of conventional wisdom" and asserting that, "without the development of new tactics and techniques capable of exploiting rapidly changing situations, command, however well defined, is meaningless."¹ Look at that again; "Without...new tactics and techniques...command...is meaningless." Now if that assertion is correct, our current doctrine renders command and therefore commanders, meaningless. It is also asserted that "only through a solid conceptual understanding of MW can commanders hope to make the right decisions as events occur on the battlefield."² I am prompted to ask what manner of fruit these men eat that they grow so wise? Surely command is a meaningful institution even if we have less than perfect tactics and techniques. And surely even a commander unenlightened about MW concepts would occasionally stumble onto a right decision. Perhaps I am but a reactionary neanderthal, from whose eyes the scales of FAW have not yet fallen.

Also legion in military history, are examples of equally tragic and severe losses due to the premature abandonment of proven battle concepts. The admonition to entertain new ideas is valid. MW does promise the possibility of permitting us to fight outnumbered and win, and it is compatible with the long standing tradition of our Corps to retain maximum discretion and authority at the lowest feasible level, thus fostering initiative. But MW is now only in the conceptual stage, until it can be articulated as doctrine, we must be very conservative about shedding proven concepts. Perhaps Admiral King's memorandum is the appropriate balance to General Breckenridge's advice: "Initiative means freedom to act, but it does not mean freedom to disregard or to depart unnecessarily from standard procedures or practices or instructions. There is no degree of being 'independent' of the other component parts of the whole--."3

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